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SUBJECT: WHO: 58TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY: U.S.-HOSTED
SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL MEETING ON PANDEMIC INFLUENZA
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

1. HHS Assistant Secretary for Public Health Emergency Preparedness Stewart Simonson hosted a scientific and technical meeting on pandemic influenza preparedness and response at the 58th World Health Assembly on May 17, 2005. This meeting followed up on discussions started at the previous day's Ministerial meeting on avian influenza hosted by HHS Secretary Michael O. Leavitt (septel). Mr. Simonson co-hosted the meeting with Dr. Klaus Stohr, Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Influenza Programme and Dr. Supachai Kunaratanapruk, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health, Kingdom of Thailand. Countries represented at the meeting included Australia, Cambodia, Canada, the People's Republic of China, East Timor, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Laos People's Democratic Republic, Mexico, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Also attending were representatives from the European Commission, the WHO Headquarters, the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO), the WHO Regional Office for Southeast Asia (SEARO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

2. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss current gaps, challenges and opportunities in influenza surveillance and response activities. The experts who made formal presentations included: Dr. Nguyen Tran Hien, the Director of the National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology in the Ministry of Health of Viet Nam, who gave a presentation on national public health and agricultural perspectives about the avian influenza outbreak in Southeast Asia; Dr. Samuel Jutz of the FAO, who spoke on issues in international organization collaboration on avian influenza control; Mr. Dick Thompson, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility at the WHO Secretariat, who presented on risk communication before and during pandemic influenza events; and Dr. Bruce Gellin, the Director of the National Vaccine Program Office who spoke on international research collaboration. The rest of the meeting was devoted to the views and considerations on these subjects by country representatives.

3. The general consensus of the discussion was that H5N1 avian influenza represents a threat to global security and public health, and that a pandemic influenza would have significant negative public health, agricultural, economic and social implications for all countries. Therefore, greater and timely collaboration and coordination are needed, both within countries and internationally, to control the H5N1 outbreak in Southeast Asia and reduce the risk of the emergence of a pandemic influenza.

4. The experts concluded the countries now affected by the H5N1 outbreak need greater support, including capacity-strengthening in animal and human epidemiological surveillance, laboratory diagnostics, outbreak-control measures, prevention of human infection and improved patient care. Consideration of the apparent changes in H5N1 avian influenza outbreak dynamics, including changes in human disease in northern Viet Nam virulence (and thus longer patient survival times that lead to a greater risk of infection transmission between persons), and an increased frequency of detected clusters of human cases, again, especially in Viet Nam, should guide the process of making investments in these areas. The experts agreed that international laws should feature an integration of approaches and activities by Ministries of Health and Agriculture and that financial and technical support should come from developed countries, international organizations such as the WHO and FAO, regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and interested private and public organizations.

5. Meeting participants believed the H5N1 virus is now endemic in Asia in waterfowl, especially ducks and geese, as well as some species of migratory birds, and its presence in wildlife reservoirs makes eradication efforts impractical. Therefore, the experts judge that human H5N1

infection-control and prevention efforts, and efforts to protect the poultry industries in affected countries, should focus on interventions that protect domestic poultry from infection and protect people from H5N1 exposure, including implementation of stronger flock biosecurity measures, possibly also including the judicious use of bird vaccinations, and on distancing people from H5N1 risk through greater public awareness in personal protection practices, such as food safety measures. The group agreed with the experts that research and development is needed on such human health interventions as the use of a safe and effective H5N1 vaccine and antivirals.

16. Assistant Secretary Simonson expressed his appreciation for the insights and comments offered by meeting participants, and felt they were very helpful to our collective continuing deliberations on avian influenza and pandemic preparedness. Assistant Secretary Simonson has cleared this cable.
Moley